

Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; television journalist Sir David Frost of the BBC; President Jacques Chirac of France; and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. Participants in the interview were: Andrew Gowers, Financial Times; Martin Newland, Daily Telegraph; and Paul Potts, Press Association. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on Signing the National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week Proclamation

November 14, 2003

Thank you all for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. Welcome to the people's house.

In a few moments, I will sign a proclamation in honor of employers across America who have shown their support for our National Guardsmen and reservists. In times of need, our Nation counts on the guard and reserve members to fulfill their commitments of service. We value their courage, and we honor their sacrifice. They are defending their Nation in the war on terror, and they're serving in a just cause.

Our guardsmen and reservists depend on the understanding of their employers. Across America, where units have been activated, employers at offices and factories and schools, hospitals, and other workplaces have been understanding and really supportive. They've given priority to the needs of our Nation. Employers have shown great consideration for their workers who have been called to duty and great support for the Nation's defense. These companies have the gratitude of our Nation. They have the gratitude of the Commander in Chief.

I appreciate members of my team who are here today. Secretary Elaine Chao of the Department of Labor and Secretary Tony Principi of the Department of Veterans Affairs, thank you both for coming. I appreciate Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz at the Department of Defense for being here as well. Under Secretary David Chu; thank you for coming, David. I appreciate Acting Secretary of the Army Les Brownlee for being here. I see that General Pete Pace is here, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I ap-

preciate Assistant Secretary Thomas Hall, Assistant Secretary for Reserve Affairs, for coming; thank you, sir. I appreciate David Janes, the Acting National Chairman of the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve group. Thank you for coming.

Most of all, I thank you all for being here, particularly those who wear our Nation's uniform.

American citizen soldiers have served in every conflict since the Revolutionary War. Some of the most legendary names in American military history are associated with Guard and Reserve units. The famed "Key-stone Division," as the Pennsylvania National Guard was long known, once marched under the command of Omar Bradley. The "Rainbow Division," which drew soldiers from Guard units in 26 States and from the District of Columbia, was led in World War I by a young brigadier general named Douglas MacArthur. In 1905, 21-year-old Harry S. Truman joined the Missouri National Guard. Our 33d President learned much from his experiences in the Guard, and so did the 43d President.

But most of all, I remember the high caliber of the people with whom I served. Today, more than 1.2 million men and women serve in the Guard and the Reserve. That's almost half of America's total military strength. These men and women face the difficult challenge of balancing military duty with civilian employment. They know that the call to active duty can come at any time.

And they're always ready. Guardsmen and reservists are now serving around the world, in places like Afghanistan and in Iraq. They serve here at home as well, in the war on terror. They're meeting the terrorist enemy abroad so our fellow citizens do not have to face the enemy at home.

They are part of our efforts to employ targeted and decisive force against coldblooded terrorist killers. They're helping to train and equip Iraqis and Afghans to defend their own nations. They're helping the Iraqi and Afghan people build just and free and democratic governments. They're helping to defend the American homeland.

Our guardsmen and reservists are showing great skill and courage, and America honors their unselfish dedication to duty. Our

guardsmen and reservists rely on the support and patience of their families, their wives and husbands and daughters and sons who must bear the prolonged absence of a loved one. They rely on their civilian employers to put the national interest above the corporate or self interests. Employers of guard and reserve members make possible the contributions of our citizen soldiers. By supporting the mobilization of patriots, employers are demonstrating their own patriotism.

With us today are representatives of companies that have given outstanding support to the Guard and to the Reserve. Central Atlantic Toyota Distribution Center, D.H. Griffin Wrecking Company, Miller Brewing, Pacific Gas and Electric Corporation, Tyson Foods are all winners of this year's Secretary of Defense Employers Support Freedom Award.

These companies do all their utmost to support and encourage service in America's National Guard and Reserve. They provide pay, health care benefits, and job security to the men and women who are called to active duty. They recognize that their workers are fighting to keep America free.

Other companies are making equally important contributions. Albertson's, Clear Channel Airports, Home Depot, and Verizon all provide outstanding support to their employees during mobilizations. All of us appreciate the generosity and the public spirit shown by these outstanding companies and many others like them around our country.

Members of the guard and reserve are with us today. We're proud of your service. We thank you for your sacrifice. The war on terror has drawn on many of America's strengths, and one of the greatest strengths is the citizen-soldier, like Specialist James Dexter of the Illinois National Guard. At home, Specialist Dexter is a volunteer firefighter. In Iraq, he is serving as a military police officer. On three separate occasions in a single month, Specialist Dexter rushed to the scene of traffic accidents, twice saving the lives of American soldiers and Iraqi citizens and once putting out a dangerous fire. He was awarded the Bronze Star. He has earned the gratitude of our country for his service.

America needs the Guard and Reserves more today than we have had in decades. We're at war. Yet we're fortunate that so many of our citizens have heeded the call to serve a cause greater than themselves. And we are fortunate that our Guard and Reserve units have received such support from America's business community. As a sign of America's gratitude, I'm pleased to invite representatives from the nine companies here today to join me in signing a proclamation designating National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week.

May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless our great country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:16 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rear Adm. David Janes, USN (Ret.), National Chair, National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Proclamation 7736—National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week, 2003

November 14, 2003

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

From before the American Revolution, to the Civil War, to the wars in Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, our National Guard and Reserve have served our country with distinction. Today, our National Guard and Reserve forces are active on every front in the War on Terror. During National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week, we honor our courageous citizen-soldiers and their employers, whose continued support is vital to the success of our Armed Forces and to the strength of our country.

America's Guard and Reserve personnel are training hard and deploying frequently to meet new challenges worldwide. These brave defenders have performed combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. They have provided security at Guantanamo Bay. They have prepared for homeland security missions. Our Nation is blessed and grateful for